

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

R. BRUCE JOSTEN
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT
GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

1615 H STREET, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20062-2000
202/463-5310

June 18, 2009

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the world's largest business federation, representing more than three million businesses and organizations of every size, sector, and region, urges the Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) to adopt rules that would award Rural Development Broadband Program grants and loans funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Recovery Act) on an expedited basis to reputable applicants who demonstrate that they have ready-to-go projects that will bring broadband to unserved areas.

According to the latest information from RUS, funds from the first round of broadband funds included in the Recovery Act are anticipated to be awarded by the end of the first quarter of FY 2010. However, with the unemployment rate increasing to 9.4% in May 2009, economic development and job creation are more important now than ever. President Obama recently pledged to accelerate spending in the Recovery Act to save or create 600,000 jobs over the next three months. Broadband is a key driver of economic growth and accelerating broadband funding from RUS is consistent with the President's goal.

According to a recent analysis by USTelecom, broadband/ICT (information, communications, and technology) jobs pay 50% more than the hourly national average, and, for at least the next 10 years, broadband-enabled jobs are anticipated to continue to be among the leading high-growth areas.¹ Connected Nation predicts that with a modest increase in broadband adoption, the United States could realize a total direct economic impact of \$134 billion annually including \$92 billion in new wages from the 2.4 million jobs created through broadband growth.²

¹ Press Release, "Broadband Drives U.S. Economic Growth, USTelecom Analysis Show," USTelecom, May 14, 2009, available at: <http://www.ustelecom.org/News/NewsItems/Broadband-Drives-US-Economic-Growth-USTelecom-Analysis-Shows.html>.

² Executive Summary, *The Economic Impact of Stimulating Broadband Nationally*, Connected Nation, Feb. 21, 2008, available at: http://www.connectednation.com/documents/Connected_Nation_EIS_Study_Executive_Summary_02212008.pdf

The Chamber reiterates its recommendation that RUS adopt a transparent process for awarding broadband grants and loans funded by the Recovery Act. RUS should post all funding applications and related documents to the Web. To minimize fraud, waste, and abuse and to maximize the impact of these funds, successful applicants must have a solid track record and a sound business plan.

The Chamber looks forward to working with you and RUS as the Rural Development Broadband Program is implemented and appreciates your consideration of an expedited award process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Bruce Josten", written in a cursive style.

R. Bruce Josten

Cc: Susan Crawford, Special Assistant to the President for Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy